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ELSA.

Oh, the world is a-brim with the sweetness of summer;
The skies are deep blue, and the earth is dark green;
But the soft little cheek of this precious new-comer
Is dearer to me than all roses, I ween!

This soft little cheek, laid to mine, so long lonely,
Makes the world seem as bright as if all were new-made;
For this soft human flower is for me, and me only,
To bring it to beauty, to watch it fade.

Lie close, little head, to the heart that you lighten;
Clasp fast, little hand, to the hand you make strong;
Interweave, little life, with the life that you brighten,
For the love of you brings back the secret of song!

O my baby! my baby! there's much you must touch;
There are problems that only your dimples can solve;
And it is only through you that the best good can reach me,
And it is around you that my best thoughts revolve!

Ah, dear little feet! I must sit down below you,
And try to unlearn all my trouble and pain,
For what is there left of my life fit to show you?
My child, that has made me turn child-like again!

—Howard Glyndon, in *Baldwin's Monthly*.

STEP-MOTHER AND STEP-SON.

A Story of Love, Jealousy, Hatred, Revenge and Heroic Self-Sacrifice.

By the Author of "Dora Thorne," "A Bridge of Love," "At War with Herself," "A Golden Dawn," "Which Loved Him Best?" "A Rose in Thorns," &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

There never was picture more dazzling perhaps than that presented by Larchton Mere with its covering of snow. Snow beautified everything it touches, but it changed Larchton into "fairy-land," lying like a bridal veil over the fair earth. It was worth traveling a hundred miles to see the tall firs and larches stretch out their grand, bare branches laden with snow, to see the holly-trees with their fair burdens of scarlet berries and the soft, white snow lying in the hollow of the glossy green leaves, to see the giant oaks and beeches, and the hoar-frost like a net of delicate silver thrown over the hedges, to see the grand, picturesque pile of building called Larchton Mere, and the broad sheet of water from which it took its name, which was frozen over now and looked like a silver lake.

Over the beautiful landscape the moon was shining brightly. The magnificent mansion, with its picturesque turrets, its grand sweep of terraces, and its large oriel windows, stood out clearly, the moon lighting up every line of the delicate tracery round doors and windows. From the windows streamed floods of light; and, when the great hall door opened to admit one or other of the numerous visitors, there came forth a warm, ruddy glow that was cheerful and pleasant to see.

The interior of the house was the very ideal of comfort and luxury; the entrance-hall with its lofty groined roof, the magnificent suite of rooms that lay on either side, the broad staircase with its rich crimson carpets and white statues, the large and well-filled picture-gallery, and the broad corridors upon which the sleeping-rooms opened, were all exquisitely decorated and brilliantly lighted, while the air was fragrant with the breath of flowers.

It was six o'clock on Christmas Eve; and the sole occupant of the drawing-room was a very young and handsome man, who looked far older than he really was. He was of lofty stature and powerful build, with a certain well-bred ease and careless grace that became him well. His head, well set and proudly carried, noble in shape and contour, was crowned with clusters of dark hair. At first sight he looked unlike an Englishman, resembling one of those dark, handsome Spaniards whom Velasquez has immortalized. After a second glance, one felt quite sure that he was English, from the frank and bold expression of his face. His complexion was dark, and a dark moustache shaded a beautifully-shaped mouth.

His character might be read in his handsome, high-bred face; he was proud, generous, impulsive, impatient of control, frank, bold and independent; and, judging from the dark eyes that shone at times with dreamy splendor, he was poetical and imaginative—perhaps not the best-tempered of his race, given to quick ebullitions of hot anger, forgotten a few moments afterwards, but none the less sharp while they lasted. He possessed a simple, straightforward sense of honor that won every one.

He might have been forgiven some impatience at that moment, for he had much to try him. His father was bringing home a step-mother, and the young man could not conceal his anger. It seemed to him unjust and unfair that a girl should be brought into the very heart of his home and put in his mother's place. His father had been happy enough for twenty years; why should he bring a wife home now? To add to the young man's annoyance, not only was his father bringing his new wife home, but he had also arranged for the usual Christmas-party; and the son had little heart just then either for receiving or entertaining guests. So that

Ross Lewin Cumnor had some little excuse for the frown on his dark, handsome face.

His father, Sir Austin Cumnor, of Larchton Mere, was almost the last descendant of the grand old race of Cumnors. The Cumnors had been holders of Larchton since the reign of James I.; and, though frequently offered a title, had never cared to accept it. They had been quite content with the simplicity of their own untarnished name. But Sir Austin differed from his ancestors in this respect; and, when he was offered a Baronetcy for some political service that he had rendered to Government, he accepted it. The estates of Larchton Mere were not entailed. It was always in the power of the head of the family to leave them as he would. But, as a rule, they had passed either from father to eldest son or from brother to brother. Sir Austin was quite at liberty, if he chose, to disinherit his son and sell all his property; there was no one to say him nay or to interfere.

Sir Austin was a handsome, accomplished man; and during his Continental tour he met and fell in love with a Spanish heiress. He married her and they lived together in perfect happiness. Inez de Luna loved her handsome English husband with all her heart. One son—Ross—was born to them; and then came the sorrow that blighted Sir Austin's life. His beautiful young wife lingered out in the woods one night while a heavy mist was falling, caught a violent cold, which settled on her lungs, and, in spite of all that skill, love or money could do, she died in less than six months, leaving her little child Ross and her husband disconsolate.

For twenty years Sir Austin mourned her, and devoted himself to the boy. When Ross went to Eton and Oxford, his father spent a great deal of his time in traveling up and down to see him; and, when business of some importance connected with his late wife's estate took Sir Austin to Spain, by his desire Ross remained at Larchton Mere.

"You will find plenty of amusement and plenty of occupation," said Sir Austin. "You will have hunting, shooting and fishing, and the care of the estate. It will teach you more than all else to have the management of the place in your own hands." And Ross was well pleased to be able to prove his ability.

Sir Austin had not thought of being away longer than two months; but in this case the adage of "Man proposes" was verified. Passing through Paris on his way to Spain, he stayed a few days with some old friends, Lord and Lady Sligo. At their house he met a beautiful English girl, who, from the first moment she saw him, marked him for her own. She was a distant relative of Lady Sligo, clever and accomplished, and at the age of twenty-six still unmarried. Sir Austin, who had never given even a thought to the sex since the death of his beloved wife, fell an easy victim; and Hester Reyburn became Lady Cumnor almost before Sir Austin knew what he was doing.

They were married at the English Embassy. Lord and Lady Sligo, with a host of fashionable friends, were present. The marriage was hurried on, because Hester declared the one great desire of her life was to visit Spain. But the fact was, Sir Austin talked so much and so often of his son that she was afraid, if he once went away from Paris without her, Ross would prevent the marriage. In her bland, amiable way she had contrived to obtain every information from Sir Austin. She knew that, although his title must descend to his son, his estates were not entailed, and that, if he chose to do so, he could leave them to her; and she resolved that he should at least give her the greatest share of them.

She talked to him continually about this son of his who so strongly resembled his beautiful Spanish mother; and in her heart even then she was jealous of him. Sir Austin believed it was her kindly interest in all that concerned him which made her ask so many questions; and he was delighted to give her every detail about the boy—his feats in the hunting field and with the gun, his skill in all manly sports and the fine arts, his polished manners and graceful bearing. The father spoke from the depth of his heart, for his son was to him the very apple of his eye. Hester knew by her own keen instinct that all would be lost for her if father and son met before her marriage. Therefore she affected a great desire to go to Spain, "the land of chivalry and romance," she said. "I have always longed to see it."

Of course, Sir Austin could say nothing less than that her wish should be gratified; and, as they were engaged, it was hardly worth while to defer the marriage until he came back from Spain. It was just a little against his better judgment that he married hastily. He did not ask his son over to the wedding. Lady Sligo told him it would be much better not to do so.

"It would be awkward," she said, "for a young bride like Hester to have a grown-up son at her marriage, and, of course, Hester must be consulted first."

So Sir Austin merely wrote to his son to tell him of the great impending change, and that his journey would be prolonged.

They had been away fifteen months when this Christmas Eve came round; and Ross, in compliance with his father's wish, had invited some of his old friends to meet him on his return.

Dinner had been ordered for eight, and the great clock had struck the hour of seven when Ross first heard the sound of approaching wheels. He rose hastily from his chair, and sought comfort by pacing up and down the room.

"I suppose it is childish," he said; "but I do not like to know that my mother's place is filled. I am afraid that I shall hate the woman who sits in her chair, wears her jewels and takes her name. It will seem hard to me to hear my father use loving words to her. The feeling is childish and unreasonable, perhaps. My father had a perfect right to please himself. I must try to conquer myself. At least, I will receive her kindly. I must never forget that she is a woman—and a lady."

So, when the carriage stopped, he went down to the hall door. His father was the first to descend, and Ross hastened to him. After the fashion of Englishmen, there was no scene, no embracing; nothing but an eager clasp of each hand told how delighted they were to meet again. The son's heart went out to his noble, handsome, genial father, and the father's to his handsome, eager, impetuous son. They stood together in silence for a few moments; and then Sir Austin said, gently:

"I am glad to see you again, my boy."

"And I, father—I am glad to see you."

Then came the sweet sound of a woman's voice. Sir Austin turned hastily.

"I have brought quite a large family home, Ross," he said. "Come and welcome my treasures."

A tall, graceful, superbly-dressed woman approached them; and Sir Austin said, in a tone of some emotion:

"My dearest wife, let me introduce to you my son."

Ross looked at the veiled figure before him. The costly velvets and furs trailed on the ground. She raised her veil hastily, as though she wished to speak, and he was almost stricken dumb by the sight of her beautiful face. She was exquisitely fair; but, instead of the meek, amiable expression that generally accompanies blue eyes and golden hair, this lady had a proud, determined look; and he did not like the expression of her eyes—no tenderness or love lay in them. She raised her face to his, and he lightly touched her cheek with his lips. Sir Austin looked on delighted.

"That is right," he said. "When my wife and my son have learned to love each other, my happiness will be complete."

"Which son?" asked her ladyship, laughingly, as she drew her rich furs and velvets round her and hastened into the hall, which was lined by servants in the Cumnor livery.

Ross wondered just a little at her words; and then he was standing face to face with the loveliest girl he had ever beheld—face to face before he had time to wonder who she was. Sir Austin said, with a bright, happy smile:

"I told you that I was bringing a large family home, Ross. This is—I am almost at a loss how to explain the relationship—let me say, my adopted daughter Leam Dynevor. She is a distant relative of your mother, Ross. A cousin of your mother married an officer in the English army. They are both dead, and have left the child to me."

Ross' heart went out to her in simple, kindly affection. He worshipped his mother's memory so reverently that any one belonging to her would be welcome to him.

Sir Austin went on:

"If Leam is my adopted daughter, she must be your sister, Ross."

"I shall be very pleased to welcome a sister," he said, frankly.

As he had kissed Lady Cumnor, he bent down to kiss the sweet face; and that kiss sealed the girl's fate.

"You are very kind to me," she said, gently; and then she hurried on after Lady Cumnor.

"The introductions must be over now," said Ross to his father, with a smile; but Sir Austin laughed gaily.

"Not yet, Ross. One of the most important has to come yet."

To Ross' surprise, he saw that there was a second carriage at the door. From it, now that the first had driven away, descended a portly woman carrying in her arms something carefully wrapped up.

"Now, Ross," cried Sir Austin, "see—now for my grand surprise! I have not only brought you home a mother and a sister, but a little brother. How proud I am to show my little son to my big one!"

Ross drew back in astonishment.

"You did not tell me, father, that you had another son."

"No," laughed Sir Austin; "I kept it for you as a grand surprise. Hester said you would be so pleased. So you are, I am sure. See, Ross, the little one has her ladyship's face and golden hair."

Ross bent over the child. The nurse raised the thick veil that hid the tiny rose-bud face.

"So this is my little brother," he said.

The baby-eyes opened in wonder to fix themselves upon his face, and the baby-lips relaxed into a faint smile that won the young man's heart. Ross stooped down and kissed the tiny face, and the nurse passed into the house with the young under-nurse in her wake.

"I have brought a family, Ross, have I not?" said Sir Austin, laughingly.

"You look surprised."

"I am surprised. I expected Lady Cumnor, but not the other two."

"I wanted to write and tell you when little Hugh was born; but my wife said, 'No; it would be a pleasant surprise for you.'"

"So it is; but I would rather that some one had written to tell me about it. I feel awkward, as though there was something I could not understand. Are you well pleased about it, father?"

"Yes," he replied; "I am, indeed."

"Then," said Ross, with his old affectionate manner, "so am I."

Yet he wondered why Lady Cumnor had wanted to surprise him; and he felt a strange, half-shy suspicion that it was not from any very kind motive.

"It is good to be at home again," said Sir Austin, as he looked round when he and his son had entered the house. "Since I left it, I have seen no place half so fair."

"You are looking well, sir," said Ross, glancing at his father. "You seem at least ten years younger."

"I am very happy, Ross," replied Sir Austin, putting his arm around his son's neck. "I loved your mother with all the love of my heart; and, when she died, I believed most honestly that all the love, brightness and happiness of my life were buried with her. For twenty long years I never looked upon the face of a woman but with indifference. I lived only for you."

"I know that," said the young man, with a deep sigh as he thought how different it would all be now.

"When I saw Hester," continued Sir Austin, "it was to me as though the sun had broken through a dark cloud. I loved her at once. Ross, I love her very much, but my matured manhood's love is very different from the passionate love I had for your mother. A man never loves twice in a life-time in the same fashion; however, I love Hester and my little son very dearly."

They had loved each other very much, these two men; and their hearts opened one to the other.

"I will tell you frankly, father," said Ross, his handsome face growing pale with emotion, "that, when I first heard of this marriage, I did not like it—I was not happy. I could not bear to think of any one else in my mother's place. But, if you are so happy, I will try to love her, too."

"That is like you, Ross. I never expected any difficulties from you."

Then Ross laid one arm over his father's shoulder.

"I am not quite sure, sir," he said, "that I do not feel just a little jealous of this younger son of yours. I have always been first. I am not sure how I shall like a rival brother."

Sir Austin laughed; but his lips quivered with emotion.

"You will always be first with me, Ross," he answered. "You know that. The baby-brother can never rival you. Hark! Are those the Larchton bells? How clearly we can hear them! I take it as a good augury that on the night I bring my wife and baby-son home the bells are ringing 'Peace on earth.' What a happy Christmas it is for me! Ross, I feel quite young again—as though I were beginning life instead of ending it. I can hardly believe that a tall, strong, well-built man like you can be my son."

"I am very glad it is so," said Ross. "Have you done all I wish about the invitations?" asked Sir Austin.

"Yes; but it seemed to me almost strange that you should wish for a dinner-party on the first night of your coming home, father."

"If ever you marry, Ross," said Sir Austin, smiling, "you will find that it is not always a case of doing just what you like. It was Hester who suggested it. She said that in all probability we should find a family-party very trying. I did not ask her why."

"Her ladyship again! Why did she say that, I wonder?" thought Ross. "One word more, sir," he said, "before you go—just one word. Will you tell me something about this beautiful girl who you say is to be my sister? Who is she?"

"Your mother had a cousin, Junia d'Altra, who married Major John Dynevor. Major Dynevor had joined the Carlists—I cannot tell you why; and he was for some years with them. After his death his wife went to live in London. Before she died she wrote to me. I never saw her; but I had heard your mother speak of her; and Junia asked me to take charge of her daughter. The girl has no fortune, and she is not a near relative; but she shall be like a daughter to me for your mother's sake. Her ladyship was very nice about it; and the girl will be a pleasant companion for her."

"Now I know of what she reminds me!" cried Ross. "I have been puzzling over it ever since I saw her face. You know Ary Scheffer's picture, 'The Christian Martyr'—the picture of a young girl dead, floating down the river with a light like an aureole round her head?"

"Yes, I know it well," replied Sir Austin.

"She has a face like that," said Ross, musingly.

"You are quite right," agreed his father; "and, so far as I know her, she is of the stuff of which martyrs are made. Are all our old friends coming, Ross?"

"Yes, all of them, I believe," was the answer.

"Mrs. Pitt and Lady Viola?"

"Yes, I believe so. I have had no refusals. I shall be anxious to know how you think I have managed the estate during your absence, sir."

"I shall rest for a few days, Ross, and then we will have a long day for business. Now we must go; that is the first dinner-bell. We shall hardly have time to dress. I am tired; yet I think we did well to have our old friends round us to-night."

Father and son went to their respective rooms, and Ross found himself more than once thinking of the girl whose face was like that of the early Christian martyr floating down the dark waters of the Tiber.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

—There is always room on top. This is especially so with a crowded street car. —*Philadelphia Chronicle-Herald*.

PERSONAL AND LITERARY.

—Milla is engaged upon a portrait of Mr. Tennyson.

—The man who wrote the libretto of "Billie Taylor" is a reporter on the London Times.

—Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan are going to call their new opera "Patience"—the name of the dairymaid heroine.

—Rumor has it that Miss Emma Thursby, the charming American cantatrice, is "engaged" to a German nobleman of immense wealth.

—Mrs. Julia Ward Howe thinks that every teacher threatened with a reduction of salary should become not only a suffragist, but an apostle of woman suffrage.

—Some of Shakespeare's plays are to be performed in London without scenery, as in the olden time, the imagination of the audience being started in the right direction by such placards on the plain wall as "A Room in Macbeth's Castle" and "A Wooded Dell."

—The late Stephen N. Stockwell, managing editor of the Boston Journal, made public bequests amounting to \$13,000, divided among nine religious and benevolent institutions. He began life as a compositor on the Worcester Spy, and his first work on the Journal was at the case.

—Mr. Benjamin Fitch, of Buffalo, N. Y., has just given to the Charity Organization Society of that city property amounting to \$200,000. It is to be used by Mr. Fitch's desire in founding and maintaining an institution for the physical, moral and intellectual benefit of the poor of Buffalo without distinction of creed or sex.

—Longfellow recently remarked of Hawthorne: "He was a shy man, and exceedingly refined. If any one thought he wrote with ease he should have seen him as I have, seated at a table with pen and paper before him, perfectly still, not writing a word. On one occasion he told me he had been sitting so for hours waiting for an inspiration to write, meanwhile filled with gloom and an almost apathetic despair."

—One night a burly Englishman who had the faculty of exciting Carlyle to frenzy by talking about O'Connell, called on him, and a ter a little talk about the weather, at it they went. It was hot and heavy and a fierce and merciless contest. Tea put a brief stop to it, but it soon began again. There were several guests present and Mrs. Carlyle put her foot on the Englishman's imploring peace. He no sooner felt the pressure than he screamed out: "Why don't you touch your husband's toe, Mrs. Carlyle? I am sure he is far more to blame than I am." The whole company burst out laughing, including Carlyle himself, and tea was finished in comparative tranquility.

HUMOROUS.

—Now that measles are prevalent, mothers as well as astronomers are looking for spots on the son.—*Harvard Lampoon*.

—Indians never drink to drown sorrow. When they can get anything to drink they have no sorrow to drown.—*Boston Post*.

—The first sign of spring is the shriek of the housewife: "Wipe the mud off your boots before you come in here."—*New Haven Register*.

—A true philosopher never argues. He mentally concludes that his opponent is an ass, and keeps his mouth shut.—*New York Commercial Advertiser*.

—An orange grove of twenty acres costs about \$10,000. Now you can understand why the train boys can't possibly sell last year's oranges, lined with saw-dust, for less than ten cents apiece.—*Burlington Hawkeye*.

—A woman may be so sick all the winter that she can't wear her new bonnet to church, but along towards the middle of April she will manage to crawl out of bed, turn the house upside down, and call it "spring cleaning."—*Norristown Herald*.

—They had been engaged to be married fifteen years and still he had not mustered up resolution enough to ask her to name the happy day. One evening he called in a particularly spongy frame of mind, and asked her to sing him something tender and touching, something that would "move" him. She sat down at the piano and sang: "Darling, I am growing old."—*Brooklyn Eagle*.

—Bub's composition on the rhinoceros: The rhinoceros lives in Azher and wens kant stick a pin in 'im cause hiz wenskit iz bilt ov ole stoves. Wens a rhinoceros iz gonter be kild yu mus alwaze go up to him from before so az he'll kno somethin ov it an' try to make a place for a bullit to git in. Hiz noze is got a upper teeth that's got no businez ware it iz and if a boy shoos set down on it he better sta plugd up with the tooth r'els he'll be all won pore. I'd rather be a polliwog if I waz a rhinoceros, tho! I spose if I wuz I woodent.—*Yonkers Gazette*.

—Fuchsias in Summer.—Dr. Wolcott had a lot of fuchsias planted under the shade of a high apple tree, and all summer long they kept growing and blooming better than any I have seen in the neighborhood. Next to them ranks a lot of fuchsias planted in front of an east facing house on Garden street, in a rather cool, shady place, and where they were freely showered from the hose on Summer evenings. Fuchsia gracilis and virgata bloom freely with us in sunny exposures, and are graceful and pretty, but as fuchsias the smallness of their blossoms is a drawback to their favor. Most of the other fuchsias we have tried in sunny places are not satisfactory.—*Gardener's Monthly*.